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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the evolution of multiculturalism in the Canadian context. Some opponents of multiculturalism in Canada detect in the ideology an undermining of a unique Canadian identity in favor of hyphenated Canadians, while proponents see the hyphenation as adding richness and color to the Canadian character. This controversy is nothing new. In Canada, as in the Untied States, citizens have been struggling with the issue of reconciling diversity into national identity. The United States and Canada have dealt with cultural and ethnic diversity in two different ways, with the "melting pot" the goal for U.S. society, and the "mosaic" the goal for Canadian. The multicultural reality of Canada is enshrined in the Charter of Rights enacted in 1982 as an official policy for the Federal government. However, much of the work to promote multiculturalism falls into the purview of education, a responsibility of the provinces, and each has been free to commit to the policy in the way that it sees fit. Five provinces have endorsed the policy of multiculturalism, but Quebec has pursued a different approach by promoting intercultural education, looking toward a pluralistic outlook within a Francophone society. A national study, "Multicultural Education: A Place To Start" by K. McLeod and E. Krugly-Snolska (1997) has identified four phases of multicultural education in Canada. These are characterized by emphasis on: (1) cultural reinforcement; (2) group and intergroup relations; (3) antiracism; and (4) multicultural citizenship. The last phase encompasses citizenship education, inter-group relations, human rights and equity, and combats discrimination and racism. Multicultural policy has the potential for creating divisiveness, but it has a continuing and vital role to play in the ongoing definition of cultural wisdom and practices in Canada. (Contains 11 references.) (SLD)

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Unscrambling the Semantics of Canadian Multiculturalism

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Unscrambling the Semantics of Canadian Multiculturalism

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Preamble

In this paper, I explore the evolution of the term multiculturalism in the Canadian context. Additional terminology that applies to manifestations of multicultural education is also discussed. Although the paper is concerned with multiculturalism in Canada, some reference is made to how multiculturalism has developed in the United States, especially as outlined in Nathan Glazer's book *We are all Multiculturalists now* (1997). It is striking to note that the same terminology appears in the American context as in the Canadian one, albeit at different times and periods. For example, many Canadians, uncomfortable with the term multiculturalism have recently resorted to referring to the phenomena as "cultural pluralism" instead. This term apparently was used about the time of the First World War by John Dewey and his followers to promote education which would include other cultures in addition to an Anglo-american focus.

Some opponents of multiculturalism in Canada detect in the ideology an undermining of a unique Canadian identity in favour of hyphenated Canadians, whereas proponents see the hyphenation as adding richness and colour to the Canadian character. The controversy is nothing new, however. Dewey in 1916 argued that a hyphenated or pluralistic make-up constitutes the very essence of Americans:

> The fact is, the genuine American, the typical American, is himself a hyphenated character....[H]e is international and interracial in his make-up... The point is to see to it that the hyphen connects instead of separates.
> (quoted in Glazer, p. 86)

To note a further example, one could mention the case of Quebec. Because of the importance it places on linguistic preservation and its concern for maintaining its unique québécois culture, Quebec has always resisted the notion of multiculturalism in favour of interculturalism. Evidently in the USA, in the 1940s, there was a movement promoting "intercultural education" with a goal to teach about various ethnic and racial groups and to encourage tolerance. This is the approach used in Quebec today with respect to recognition of its many minorities. "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!"

These examples illustrate that in both countries, characterized by cultural and ethnic pluralism from their very beginnings, citizens have been struggling with this issue of reconciling diversity into national identity, recognizing how very sensitive the issues are. Nevertheless, common knowledge would affirm that Canada and the United States have dealt with their cultural and ethnic diversity in two very different ways symbolized by the different metaphors representing the goal for society: the "melting pot" in the United States and the "mosaic" in Canada. Of course, it is increasingly recognized just how problematical and questionable these terms are when it comes to approaches to forge a national identity out of diverse groups.

Political and historical context of multiculturalism in Canada

A major difference between Canadian and American conception of multiculturalism lies

in the fact that the multicultural reality of Canada is enshrined in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, enacted in 1982. Section 27 of the Charter states: "This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canada."

Multiculturalism had been officially adopted as policy prior to the enactment of the Charter as a result of the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* which had been set up in 1963 to investigate the status of the French and English languages across Canada. The report went beyond "biculturalism" however, and in Volume 4 of the Commission's report, *The cultural contribution of the other ethnic groups,* 1969, the issue of multiculturalism was addressed. As a result of that report, two advisory bodies were set up in 1971: The Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism" and "The Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee" to report to a newly established Minister of State responsible for multiculturalism. The policy was announced (but not enacted at that time) with all party support in Ottawa. The provincial governments agreed to the policy, recognizing that their acceptance could perhaps result in gaining ethnic votes. Financial incentives would also be made available from the Federal government to provinces for the promotion of multiculturalism.

The purpose of the multicultural policy was:

> to help all cultural groups develop the capacity to grow and contribute to Canada, to assist minority groups in overcoming cultural barriers to participate fully in Canadian society, to promote intergroup relations, and to provide facilities to minority groups for language learning. (Ghosh, 1996)

Opposition to the policy arose from those who believed it would threaten the position of the two official languages, English and French--with French being the most threatened, especially

outside of Quebec. Others feared that the policy would perpetuate lower status for groups not belonging to the two "founding" nations. The view supporting official multiculturalism expressed by proponents such as Jean Burnet (1975) understood the intent of the policy to help minority groups "maintain their ethnic organisations and cultural symbols, because preserving one's ethnic identity is considered to be consistent with acquiring a Canadian identity and taking part in Canadian society and culture." (p. 209) This argument parallels somewhat Dewey's defence of hyphenated Americans as being typical and essential, made many years earlier.

It was the Federal Government of Canada that first officially announced "official bilingualism within a multicultural framework" as then Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau declared. In a recent (1998) interview with *Cité libre*, he continues to support that designation as Canada's (and Quebec's) best hope for unity. The 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms affirmed multiculturalism in Section 27, and in 1987, the Government proclaimed the Multicultural Act (C-93), "an act for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada" to reinforce Section 27 of the Charter. It should be noted that bill C-93 in addition builds on the equality provisions in the Charter of Rights through its Race Relations Directorate, and thus ties multiculturalism more firmly to human rights and anti-racism.

The concept continues to remain thorny and controversial. The current Commissioner of Official Languages, Victor Goldbloom (1992) has stated: "As long as Canada's multiculturalism policy is and remains a policy of building links rather than barriers, it is worth maintaining and defending." (p. 8)

Others are not convinced. Some, including Canadians of ethnic minority heritage fear

that the multicultural policy creates ghettoes, binds immigrants to the past, is a colonialist attitude, and as such, does not work. This is essentially the argument proposed by Neil Bissoondath in his 1994 book *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*. His point of view has been answered by Xiaoping Li, among others. Li contends that Bissoondath's arguments are fallacious. Multiculturalism as a policy protects the immigrants from racism by asserting their rights to be; as an ideal it recognizes the diverse cultures and the right to express these differences which are rooted in their respective past. In the end, in his view, multiculturalism could very well be the strategy for national survival. (Li, 1995)

The arguments continue. Meanwhile, much of the work to promote multiculturalism falls into the purview of education, a responsibility of the provinces. Hence, each province must commit itself to the implementation of the policy in the way it sees fit. To date, five provinces in Canada have endorsed the policy of multiculturalism: Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, all with past and present large ethnic and immigrant populations. They have incorporated multiculturalism mainly through provincial policies permitting heritage language classes for the various ethnic minorities where such classes are sought, through including curriculum content reflecting multiculturalism and anti-racism, and by policies concerning hiring, tracking and directing teachers.

One of the other papers in this symposium explores heritage language education developed by seven heritage language groups in Ontario.

The province of Quebec has pursued a different approach by promoting intercultural education. Quebec has its own Charter of Rights and Freedoms dating from 1975 (7 years prior to adoption of the Canadian Charter federally). The Quebec Charter gives legal

protection to minority educational rights. Interculturalism in Quebec means that "Quebec will be pluralistic in outlook within a francophone society" (Ghosh, 1996). In effect, the goal is to encourage integration and the development of a common identity while respecting the diverse heritage of the population.

Multicultural Education

How does multiculturalism manifest itself in Canadian education? A national study, *Multicultural Education: The State of the Art* (McLeod, 1994-97) sponsored by the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, the Canadian Ethnocultural Council, the Canadian Council for Multicultural and Intercultural Education, along with other national organizations, has produced a series of reports and publications. The final report, *Multicultural Education: A Place to Start* (McLeod, Krugly-Smolska, 1997) identifies four phases of multicultural education in Canada along with types of programs that support the official policies.

According to the report, the 1970s when the multicultural policy was first proclaimed represented a first phase of **Cultural Reinforcement.** Government programs provided cultural support although the direction was on integration. Cultural and social rights were recognized in relation to human and civil rights.

Phase 2, beginning in the late 70s tried to strengthen **Group and Intergroup Relations**. It had become clear that dominant groups and public institutions represented by government, education, health services and community institutions were not recognizing nor permitting full participation of all groups. The aim became to sensitize people and agencies to

diversity, to allow minorities access to established institutions. Although programs to support immigrant adjustment and cultural programs were still in place, the emphasis was rather on intergroup participation; cultural retention was secondary. (p. 2)

Phase 3 addressed **Anti-racism.** As the 1997 **State of the Art** report notes, while progress had been made in recognizing diversity and providing access of minority groups to established institutions, African Canadian and Asian Canadian communities continued to experience restricted entry into professions. The report states:

> There were inequities in education, in schools and universities, as well as in media, policy and law and the courts; in the provisions for health care, and in many other areas in communities from business to voluntary organizations. (p.3)

Anti-racist education has been implemented in Ontario and British Columbia, especially in the large urban centres such as Toronto and Vancouver where racial and ethnic diversity is most evident (and visible).

Education in human rights and equity issues provides a vehicle for confronting racism on structural and institutional levels, as well as where individual cases have occurred. Some consider the problem of racism to be so serious that they have advocated replacing multicultural policy with anti-racist policy. The trend, however, has been to view multicultural policy as being more inclusive of all aspects of diversity, and thus to allow it to stand as long as it addresses issues of racism[1].

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[1]Incidentally, the same argument could be made with regard to feminist pedagogy, which is seen by some as a manifestation of multiculturalism, insofar as women, too, represent a feminist culture with different perspectives from the established male, white, anglo-saxon, heterosexual "norm." Feminist pedagogy which defines the "other voice" and confronts sexism while challenging the devaluation of women's ways of knowing justifies its position as a program in itself. Still, while both anti-racist education and feminist pedagogy are necessary, they are exclusive--the first concentrates on race; the latter on gender, while admitting issues common to both. Multicultural education--or as it is increasingly becoming human rights education, tries to be inclusive of all aspects of diversity.

With regard to what has been done to combine anti-racist education into general multicultural education, one could note what the Ontario Ministry of Education in a 1994 document outlined as a guide for what teachers and schools should be doing:

> The development and implementation of the policy at the local level is intended to ensure that all students achieve their potential. This goal is made possible, in part, by helping them to acquire knowledge about and confidence in their cultural and racial identities. Anti-racism and ethnocultural equity education enables students to define, detect, and reject all forms of discrimination based on race, gender, faith, language, culture, or disability. It equips all students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours they need to live and work effectively in an increasingly diverse world. (*In Common*, Vol. 1, No. 5, May/June, 1994, as quoted in *Multicultural Education: A Place to Start*, 1997, p. 17.)

The final Phase 4 is designated as **Multicultural Citizenship**. The report (1997) describes multicultural citizenship as including:

> cultural support, immigration adjustment, human rights, intergroup ethnocultural relations, anti-racism, and equity. It is based upon diversity and commitment to pluralism, ethnic and social tolerance, acceptance, and fairness, respect, and trust. It is expected of all persons in all parts of the country. It involves confronting and responding to individual and institutionalized racism and racialism. (p. 4)

This program combines the three earlier phases. It is extremely ambitious but a worthy ideal. Clearly, such a concept of multicultural education cannot be handled in a single course in the curriculum. It needs to be realized through a conscious effort of teachers, school administrators and boards to bring the culture of their schools into line with the inclusive approach to assist all participants to engage the differences in their community. This is not, however endorsement of unfettered relativism; critical judgement must prevail to challenge actions and beliefs that infringe on human rights.

One aspect of multiculturalism that has not yet been considered here is aboriginal

education. Indeed, representatives of Canada's First Nations often express the view that multiculturalism which represents ethnic rights is not their concern; rather the need is to focus on Native rights. Nevertheless, the fourth phase of multiculturalism described above encompasses citizenship education, inter-group relations, human rights and equity, and combats discrimination and racism. As such, indigenous people while maintaining their priority on native rights, can join in the development of programs for multicultural citizenship. The paper by Arlene Stairs, focuses on some of the issues of the culture of aboriginal schools.

Finally, multicultural education is not limited to social studies and literature courses, or realized through language programs to sustain the various cultural groups. It can be reflected across the curriculum in mathematics, science and technology courses as well. Allan Pitman explores multicultural elements that can be found in mathematics education.

Conclusions

The above has been an attempt to explore some of the facets of multiculturalism, and to consider how the term has evolved over the past thirty years in Canada. The reality of Canada is characterized by a heterogeneous, yes, multicultural society. Critics of both left and right have problems with government policies that foster pluralism. Some would like to see the Multicultural Act repealed and all funding to support the working of the multicultural and intercultural councils suspended. No doubt, if all that multiculturalism means is celebrations of quaint customs and festivals of various ethnic groups, it is indeed insidious, patronizing and exclusionary. If competing and conflicting values of various groups are dealt with in a way that avoids the issue, and undermines real resolution, then that too is self defeating and a

recipe for chaos and social confusion. A more positive alternative would consist of taking each case on its own merits and deciding it in terms of human rights considerations and Canadian civil law. That is the approach recommended by the Human Rights Commission of Canada (Eliadis, 1996).

Multicultural policy does have the potential for creating divisiveness and for hampering the development of a confident and unique Canadian identity among its citizens. However, multicultural policy has always been intended as inclusive and meant to encourage intergroup relations, to foster tolerance and informed understanding through a recognition of the contributions that groups of various origins make to Canadian society: it is a policy which deserves support and continued implementation. Uncertainty surrounds multiculturalism today in Canada, but I believe we should be optimistic. Tension around the issues of language and cultural rights is a healthy sign, and implies that people are still willing to work at these very complex and disparate realities within Canadian society. Multicultural citizenship education in all its manifestations has a continued role to play in the challenge of the ongoing definition of cultural wisdom and practices.

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